



THE FOREIGN SERVICE
OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

American Embassy,
1, Grosvenor Square, London, W. 1.

August 31, 1959

OFFICIAL - INFORMAL
SECRET

Dear Jim and Francis:

Although in due course you will no doubt receive from S/S copies of the enclosed Memorandum of Conversation, I thought you might be interested in obtaining it a little sooner as suggesting the sort of thing some of the participants might be talking or thinking about in their trip to Moscow.

It was an excellent luncheon, as you might gather from the fact that it lasted from 1:00 until 4:00 instead of from 1:00 until 2:30 as it was supposed to. It began with a discussion of the Irish (Bevan having just returned from a vacation in Ireland), thence the definition of corpus delicti, and thence to tastes in detective novels, a subject which continued until almost the dessert course. It seems that everybody is addicted to Perry Mason and Ellery Queen. Consensus was that Dashiell Hammet was the greatest of them all. Healey said that he liked lots of blood, gore and sex in his diet, but found Mickey Spillane a little too strong. Gaitskell, on the other hand ("desiccated calculating machine"), said that he preferred detective stories with a more mathematical plot. Everybody liked John Buchan, although Nye said that in real life he had been something of a prig. Nye confessed that he had found Raffael Sabatini instructive as well as pleasurable --

James Swihart, Esquire,
EUR/BNA,
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Washington 25, D. C.

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he had learned a good deal of history, especially about the Spanish Inquisition, from Sabatini. We discovered that L. T. Merchant and Bevan have at least one thing in common: they can both quote by heart the opening paragraph of Swiss Family Robinson.

It is a pity to interrupt this by politics, where everyone's views are much more familiar. Since Friday I have asked myself, however, why it is that the Labor leaders return so persistently to the ideas of disengagement and the Rapacki Plan.

An obvious answer is that it is Healey's and Gaitskell's baby; they thought of it, or something like it, as long ago as 1955-56, in preparation for Gaitskell's lectures at Harvard. It is quite clear that the rest of the Labor party leadership are not so absorbed in the subject. A number, like George Brown, Shinwell, Bellenger and others, would be rather hesitant about putting such ideas into practice. Still, by and large, the doctrine commends itself to most of the party and to the trade-unions as not unreasonable, and hence acceptable, especially when they see that such respectable sources as the Guardian, Observer, and certain military figures advance the same ideas. It commends itself especially to the left wing of the party as something tending in the direction of rapprochement with the Soviet Union and calculated to bring the Germans down a peg or two.

Another obvious answer is that as an Opposition party, the Labor leaders have to oppose the official positions, and if they did not have this opposition doctrine, they would have to invent another. They would add, I suppose, that of all Opposition doctrines, this is the most moderate, tentative, and compatible with our essential interests.

But there is more in it than merely this. Sometimes I have the impression that we are talking at cross purposes when we discuss the subject with them, or are proceeding from different premises. The three main differences seem to me (1) with regard to security, (2) political valuation of Germany, and (3) political evaluation of the Soviet Union.

With respect to security, I think that the Labor leaders would protest that they are as much interested in this subject

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as anybody, although they are without the benefit of access to official military information (and unencumbered by technical military objections). But whereas people like Strauss and the generals, at the mention of security, think in terms of Soviet capabilities in the event of actual conflict, the Labor leaders do not regard "threat of war" as the real problem so long as an appropriate amount of insurance is maintained (no more than farmers think of hail or frost compensation as the real problem of agriculture, provided they have some insurance). The military insurance, in their view, is really provided by SAC, plus enough conventional armed forces for the preservation of local law and order, and plus enough symbolic American contingents stationed somewhere, anywhere, in Europe to guarantee that America would be involved in the remote chance that the Soviets would commit aggression in Europe. This last point is one much stressed by Viscount Montgomery. The result is that they think of the "shield" not as any very real shield (and they can discourage at length about the French divisions in North Africa, the deficiencies of the British forces in Germany, and sentiment in the Scandinavian countries, if one argues this point) -- but as at most a "trip-wire", and a rather dangerous one at that, if bedecked with atomic weapons.

Instead, then, of viewing the Soviet divisions in East Germany as primarily a threat to the West, they consider them to be most conspicuously a padlock and gaoler to the peoples of the Satellite nations. From many trips to Warsaw, Leipzig, Prague, and other places behind the Iron Curtain, the Labour leaders are convinced that, if only the Soviet gaoler could be removed, the impetus which already exists in these countries toward greater freedom and democracy ^{existing} would expand enormously, and that without ~~existing~~ to be socialist countries (no doubt still within a Soviet sphere of influence), they would at least become countries that one could live and deal with in a much more peaceful atmosphere than exists at present.

When one gets down to specifics, I am struck by the fact that they value West German objections much less highly than we. If the argument is advanced that their schemes of inspection and arms limitation would discriminate against Germany as well as Poland and other Satellite countries, their prompt reply, as Bevan made at the luncheon the other day, is that there are "geographical and historic

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reasons" for this.

Finally, I am struck by the differences in evaluation of the Soviet Union by the Labor leaders and ourselves. Since the Russian revolution they have been traditionally sympathetic toward the Soviet Union, at least within its own borders. Local Communists in the trade-union movement and in Western Europe they consider as much of a nuisance as we do; and Communist domination of the Satellite states they regard as a blight, perhaps even more of a blight, than we do -- at any rate they are prepared to make greater concessions to remove this blight. But the Communist government within the Soviet Union they cannot regard as a "conspiracy against mankind" so much as an interesting and on the whole successful experiment in socialism adapted to the conditions of the more backward eastern lands. This is very much the view of Bevan and all of the left wing. Intellectuals like Denis Healey think of the Russians more in terms of power politics, where there is no use in "kidding ourselves", as he would say. Moderates like Gaitskell, and many of his friends, would not necessarily ascribe only good intentions to the Soviet Union; but they feel that it is pre-occupied mainly with its home problems, and that there exist sufficient common interests between the Russians and ourselves (disarmament, detente, economic relations, and other) to reach agreements which, without altering the power status quo, would enable us to live more comfortably with each other.

These, then, different views on the techniques of security, on the importance of the Germans, and the degree of optimism that can be harbored toward the Soviet Union, are the things in the back of the Labor leaders' mind in their persistent argument with us about disengagement and the Rapacki Plan. I don't know what we can do about it. I doubt that we can ever much influence their views, for example, with regard to security, until they again constitute a British government; I am sure that there are substantial differences in the way one looks at the problems from the viewpoint of the Government bench, answerable for its actions, and the Opposition bench, uninhibited by responsibilities or allies. Nor do I think that their views about Germany will change very much so long as Adenauer and the CDU rule exclusively: if the SPD were in power, or were admitted to a coalition, the British Laborites might show a little more consideration toward Germany. There is nothing but the

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course of time, that I can see, which will corroborate their feelings, or disillusion them, about the Soviet Union; but they can certainly see that the "thaw" these days is in the direction that they have been pointing to. The irony of the present situation, in terms of local politics, is that Macmillan and the Tories seem likely to get all the credit for it.

Please judge these reflections for no more than they are worth, my personal reactions toward the conversation on Friday reported in the enclosed memorandum.

Yours ever,

Colum

Encl.

Copy of Memorandum

cc: Francis Williamson, Esquire
R/DRW

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SECRET**MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION**

DATE: August 28, 1959

PLACE: London, England

PARTICIPANTS: Hugh Gaitskell, M.P., leader of Labor Party;
Aneurin Bevan, M.P., "Shadow Cabinet"
foreign secretary;
Denis Healey, M.P., Labor Party specialist on
military-foreign affairs questions.

The Secretary of State
Mr. Merchant, Deputy Under Secretary
Ambassador Whitney
C. Kidd, reporting officer

At a luncheon given by the Ambassador for the Labor Party leaders before their departure for Moscow the next day, they discussed at length the question of the possibility of Western negotiations with the Soviets, and, as a secondary question, relations with Spain.

Mr. Gaitskell explained to Mr. Merchant the background of their trip, beginning with the invitation received last December, which they had been prevented from accepting earlier because of developments in parliament and local politics this past spring. Now seemed to be the most convenient time. Since he and Healey had never been to Russia, although Bevan had, he was curious to receive a personal impression.

Apropos of the exchange of visits between the President and Khrushchev, Bevan said that, although he and all his colleagues welcomed it in principle, he was apprehensive about the commitments the President may have been obliged to make to his allies. On the one hand, he said, he read that the President hoped the exchange would accomplish a useful purpose; on the other, the President had no doubt had to give assurances to Adenauer and would have to do as much for de Gaulle, which would tie his hands in advance. This is what he feared. It would not be enough merely to hope to improve the atmosphere. Khrushchev would be interested in "talking business".

The Secretary said that there were no such commitments. The only thing that the President had made clear, and would stick

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upon, is that the U.S. would not negotiate under any Soviet threats of force. Provided this were recognized, there were many possibilities.

Mr. Gaitskell said that although it was a "fishing question", that was precisely what they were not clear about. What possibilities did the U.S. have in mind? As they viewed matters, there was not much likelihood of a change in the Berlin situation; both sides had stated their position; there could be no question of the West giving way on Berlin -- the Labour Party wholly agreed on this; and that was that, a dead end so to speak. They recognized that the Berlin question could probably not be solved except within the context of the German question as a whole, and there were few prospects here -- Khrushchev was certainly not prepared to drop Ulbricht yet. So the question was, where, in what area, could some progress be made?

The Secretary said that no impression of the weeks of negotiation at Geneva had been more vivid or discouraging than that of the fruitless attempt to pin down the Russians as to exactly what they meant. In all the proposals advanced about Berlin -- and we had made a number of constructive ones such as the limitation on troops and propaganda -- it always turned out to be a one-sided street; the Soviets demanded that they share in the policing of any obligations undertaken by the West, whereas the West should have no part in the policing of any obligations undertaken by them. Instead, we should take their word on trust. Even when the Soviets might be given the benefit of the doubt, as in certain statements with regard to their June 10th proposals, when asked whether they meant this or that, their invariable answer was "That is your interpretation", "that is what you say". It was impossible ever to get it clear.

The Labour leaders said that that was not surprising; they had not expected anything else on the Berlin problem. In searching where there might be some agreement, it seemed to them that the most favorable prospects lay in the area of limited disarmament. Mr. Bevan said that he was convinced that the Russians were just as anxious as the West to escape from the burden of increasing armaments. They could afford it no more than we. In the "declining dynamics" of their revolution, they needed the money for their own 7-year plan and to finance subversion abroad by loans. This, in his opinion, was what they were interested in now rather than any thoughts of aggression. They were interested in financing their own revolution rather than other people's. He had always believed that it was a

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burden to them to maintain the Eastern European satellites, and that they would be glad to cut their commitments there.

The Secretary said that at the risk of appearing unorthodox, he personally favored a very wide measure of disarmament. Where disarmament negotiations always broke down was in the "bits and pieces" approach -- there one immediately ran into the technical questions of whether one piece equalled another, a submarine equalled a squadron of planes, and what not. Much depended on how much one might trust the other side; if this trust were present you could no doubt do correspondingly more; but that is where the problem of inspection came in. If this trust were to be created, we should have to be given an opportunity "to see". Secrecy was the point on which the Soviets had always set such a premium.

Bevan interjected that here was where he was afraid of perfectionism, of the best becoming enemy of the good. Of course the Labour Party supported the widest measure of disarmament, but the argument they were continually encountering from the Germans and the French was for such perfectibility -- disarmament from the Atlantic to the Urals -- that there was never any hope of accomplishing anything. It became an excuse for doing nothing, and thus became the counsel of despair.

Healey suggested that what the Russians would never permit on their own soil (measures of inspection), they might very well permit on the soil of others -- Poland, Germany, Czechoslovakia, etc. The NATO problem was in fact constituted entirely by the Soviet troops in Eastern Europe, not Soviet capabilities in Russia. General Norstad had to devise plans, which were incidentally never fulfilled, to counter the threat of such and such number of Soviet divisions in Eastern Europe. All of his plans could be put out of kilter overnight if the Russians decided to double their strength in Eastern Europe. As this was the problem, this suggested where a solution should be sought.

Mr. Gaitskell said he had never been able to understand precisely what were the objections to the Rapacki Plan, where anyone could be the loser. As he saw matters, there was no present chance of altering the status quo to the advantage of either side; agreement would have to be sought where neither side would suffer material disadvantages and the status quo would roughly be preserved. This a plan -- not of neutralization -- but of inspection, limitation of armaments, and some redeployment of troops in Central and Eastern Europe, the "Macmillan

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plan" in fact, would accomplish. He was not convinced by the military objections to it based on the theory of graduated deterrence, or based on the supposition that arming the "shield" troops with limited atomic capabilities could stop aggression without leading on to all-out nuclear warfare.

Mr. Merchant said that he could think of three reasons against such plans as the Rapacki or other disengagement schemes: one, in the psychology of peoples and governments on the spot, the reassurance provided by seeing their defenders in their midst, the policeman on the beat so to speak, was a great deal stronger than that provided by their imagination about SAC in Omaha or a force in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Secondly, he did not believe that the risk of local flare-ups was increased by troop-contact; on the contrary, the risks of another June 17th getting out of hand would be vastly increased in the absence of Allied troops. Finally, the converse of increasing neutralism in Europe would be increasing isolationism in America.

Healey and Bevan disputed Mr. Merchant's second point, that troop contact minimized the danger of another more serious June 17th uprising in East Germany, in which West Germans might be drawn to the defence of their friends. On the contrary, they felt that West Germans would not dream of it except in the hope of involving the Allies or being sheltered by their protection. Healey subsequently conceded that security might be somewhat diminished by the absence of troop-contact, but turned the conversation to his incredulity about American troops being withdrawn all the way back home. Logistically, he said, as even General Edelman would admit, space could be found for nine divisions in Holland and Belgium or Britain. Britain had not only quartered but absorbed an army of three hundred thousand Poles during the war.

In the course of this inconclusive discussion, all three of the Labour leaders more than once acknowledged their agreement with the premises expressed by the Secretary or Mr. Merchant, and the attitude we had maintained and lessons we had drawn from the Geneva negotiations, but proffered, as they said, different conclusions, especially about the political and military feasibility of something like the Rapacki Plan. Since, as they acknowledged, a great deal depended upon one's judgment of Russian aims and capabilities these days, and of the degree of confidence that could be placed in any agreement reached, they said that they would be glad to inform Ambassador Whitney of their impressions upon their return.

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Mr. Merchant commented that one thing of which he was partially tired was the popular misimpression that time was on the Russian's side. He was convinced that if there was any lesson which history taught, it was that time was on the side of free men, and he believed that to be so today. Bevan and Healey disputed this -- Bevan pointing out the disarray of NATO (de Gaulle's position and otherwise), and Healey recalling that the lesson of Athen's war with Sparta was that neither won, but Macedonia stepped in to pick up the pieces (as China one day might do).

Apropos of NATO, Bevan said that he very much hoped there were no plans to bring Spain into NATO. Now that Spain had been admitted to the O.E.E.C., he was apprehensive. So long as it could be said that the bases in Spain were strictly an affair between the Americans and the Spaniards, there was no call for discussion of the matter in Parliament. But if it were proposed that Spain be taken into the NATO alliance, the Labour Party would be bound to oppose it in Parliament most energetically. The alliance was already "soiled" by such a Fascist country as Portugal; its fabric would be very dirty indeed if Spain were admitted. How could it any longer be pretended that this was an alliance of "free" nations in defence of their democracy? Gaitskell said that he was glad Bevan had raised the subject; the Labour Party would oppose such a thing.

The Secretary said that there should be no mistake in expressions about "American bases" here or there. America was not doing this simply for her own sake -- as far as we were concerned the necessity of stationing any troops away from home was an unpleasant one -- but to contribute to the security of our friends and allies as well as ourselves. Gaitskell replied that this was perfectly understood.

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